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ABSTRACT

This study examined the perceptions of early childhood center directors regarding their organizations, their roles, and their specific jobs. Data were obtained from 257 directors completing the Directors' Role Perceptions Questionnaire. The metaphoric images used in the directors' responses were analyzed to generate dominant themes in the way directors viewed their world of work and the discrepancy between their current and ideal conditions. From the directors' descriptions of their centers, several metaphorical themes surfaced (e.g., caring and nurturing, making connections, uniqueness and diversity), with no one theme characterizing more than 22 percent of the directors' responses. The metaphors directors used to describe their administrative role reflected a set of idealized expectations about their positions, their beliefs about the importance of the role, and their summary judgment about the nature of the position. Forty percent of directors referred to the multifaceted nature of the position that requires the balancing of multiple tasks and responsibilities (e.g., juggler); another 29 percent referred to the leading/guiding functions of the director's role (e.g., orchestra conductor, lighthouse). Among the metaphors describing the specific job, 50 percent related to pace and dealing with the unexpected. The most frequently cited metaphor combining these two elements was "roller coaster." The findings of the study confirm that examining the metaphors that directors use to describe their organizations, their administrative role, and their specific job is a powerful way to gain insight into the assumptions, beliefs, expectations, and personal visions individuals have for themselves and for their organizations. (Contains 26 references 10 figures, and 3 tables.) (Author/KB)

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IMAGES FROM THE FIELD: HOW DIRECTORS VIEW THEIR ORGANIZATIONS, THEIR ROLES, AND THEIR JOBS

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Images from the Field:
How Directors View Their Organizations, Their Roles, and Their Jobs

Paula Jorde Bloom

My interest in directors' role perceptions was prompted by an incident several years ago when I was the director of a preschool. I had just finished giving a new parent a tour of my school. While she completed her enrollment forms, I offered to entertain her son in my office. Jonathan inspected the photographs and plaques on my wall, surveyed the books and knick-knacks on my shelf, and carefully eyed the stack of papers on my desk. He then turned to me and in the unabashed candor so characteristic of a four-year-old said, "You must be the queen of this school." Deciding that a four-year-old wasn't quite ready for lecture on how "queen" didn't exactly square with my management philosophy, I simply turned to Jonathan and said, "Yes, I guess a director is a lot like a queen."

Jonathan has since graduated from college, but his innocent remark has remained etched in my memory. During these intervening twenty years I've thought a lot about how individuals view their roles and the power that personal perceptions have in shaping one's professional identity.

Different roles in any organization carry with them associated expectations; both self-expectations and the expectations of others. These role perception images evolve from a set of beliefs about the workplace and the status and worth of chosen careers. They also tend to reflect an individual's experiences and preferences, culture, level of education, and personal philosophy.

While research has been conducted on the role perceptions of administrators at the elementary and secondary educational level (Duke, 1988; Wax & Hale, 1984), little systematic research has been conducted on how early childhood directors perceive their roles. This paper is designed to fill that gap.

A Word About Methodology

During the past five years I have been collecting data from directors regarding their view of their organizations, their perception of their administrative roles, and their evaluation of their specific jobs. Some of the data have been qualitative in nature, gathered from in-depth interviews and reflective narrative journals. Interviews have been particularly useful for gaining a deeper understanding of the idiosyncratic nature of directors' career decisions. I have found that directors' narratives provide a useful vehicle for probing their interpretations of the context in which they make professional decisions. The use of narratives is premised on the belief that practitioner-derived knowledge is both trustworthy and relevant (Schon, 1987; Smyth, 1989). As Witherell and Noddings (1991) state, "the stories we hear and the stories we tell shape the meaning and texture of our lives at every stage and juncture" (p. 1).

I have also gathered quantitative data from 257 directors who have completed the *Directors' Role Perceptions Questionnaire.* This questionnaire was designed to discern patterns in responses relating to role definition, job satisfaction, job commitment, role stress, and directors' growth and change over their career cycle.

I have found metaphorical analysis to be an important technique in this line of inquiry. A linguistic metaphor is a word picture where the individual creates an image with words, combining and integrating non-linear/imaging communication with linear/verbal communication (Kopp, 1995). Different types of metaphors include: anecdotes and short stories aimed at achieving specific, limited goals; similes and analogies that emphasize a specific point; and artistic productions such as drawings or models which symbolize other things (Barker, 1985).

Using a metaphor to describe the nature of metaphors, Kopp (1995) states, "Metaphors are mirrors reflecting our inner images of self, life, and others" (p. xiii). The word metaphor comes from the Greek *meta,* meaning "above or over," and *phorein,* which means "to carry or bear from one place to another." A metaphor carries meaning from one domain to another. Metaphors are powerful because they engage the mind in making translations from a literal mental language to the analogic, from word thinking to picture thinking, from left brain to right brain thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

I have found the use of metaphors to be a powerful tool in promoting the personal and professional growth of early childhood directors. This is because the metaphors directors use often carry with them implicit natural solutions to the personal concerns they may be dealing with. As Schon (1979) points out, metaphors provide both a perspective or frame (a certain way of looking at things) and the process by which new perspectives on the world come into existence. Individuals tend to seek out personal metaphors to highlight and make coherent their own pasts, their present activities, and their goals for the future. Thus, the metaphorical images directors use can be a useful method for clarifying dominant issues relating to their personal and professional roles and for shaping their future behavior.

How Directors View Their Organizations

Early childhood organizations are complex social systems. They embody ambiguous and often paradoxical phenomena that can be understood in many ways. The challenge for early childhood directors is to make sense of and deal with this complexity. Examining the metaphors that directors use to describe their centers is one way to gain insight into the assumptions, beliefs, and personal visions they have about their organizations. Metaphors form the heart of the conceptualizations people have about what things mean and how things work. If we can help directors tap into these understandings, a bridge can be built between vision and practice.

Metaphorical Themes

An analysis of the organizational metaphors of 257 directors surfaced seven themes. The percentage of metaphors falling into each taxonomy is summarized in Table 1.

Caring and nurturing is the theme of 22% of the directors' metaphors when referring to their centers. Figure 1 and 2 capture some of these metaphors in visual images. The specific metaphor most characteristic of this category is *family*. One director states,

> *In a family each person is loved unconditionally in an emotionally secure and stable environment. At our center, we not only nurture the children, we nurture one another. We celebrate every teacher's birthday and the anniversary date of their employment. The things I do also communicate this spirit. I try to give lots of hugs to the children and emotional support to the staff.*

The family metaphor is not unique to early childhood educational settings (Baker, 1991; Morgan, 1986; Schlechty & Joslin, 1984; Wincek, 1995). Other educational settings often promote mission statements that use terminology like *family of learners* or *family atmosphere* and are built on the core beliefs of loyalty, trust, compassion, and a commitment to shared values. In their study of 47 elementary and secondary schools, Steinhoff and Owens (1986) found one-third of their respondents identified with the family metaphor. They state, "Not unlike a 'real' family, food rituals appear to be a significant glue which binds these faculty members to one another and provides a major avenue for socializing, commiserating, and bonding" (p. 5).

Change, growth, and surprise are important elements in a cluster of metaphors used by 18% of directors. These directors see their centers as ever-changing and growing organizations. Flux, transformation, change, and growth are generally viewed in positive terms in the metaphors selected by these directors (e,g., *climbing a ladder, lens coming into focus).* Even the occurrence of surprise is cast in positive terms (*surprise party, a box of chocolates).* Directors whose dominant metaphors fall into this category see their organizations as living, dynamic systems, not static or stagnant entities. Figure 3 is one director's metaphorical representation that could be classified in this category.

Making connections as a metaphorical theme characterized another 16% of directors' responses. Here the emphasis is on the relationship between the parts to the whole (as in *jigsaw puzzle* or *quilt*) and working together (as in *Broadway play*). Figures 4 - 7 are some examples of visual representations of this metaphorical category. In describing her choice of a jigsaw puzzle, Karen elaborates,

> *In operating a center there are a lot of different pieces. Every piece has a place and it fits to make a whole. Typically, the director is the only one who sees the picture on the top of the puzzle box and is capable of fitting those pieces together, but she can't do it alone.*

The centrality of relationships is seen in the metaphors in this category. As a management philosophy, many of these directors believe that sustaining positive productive relationships is at the core of effective program administration. Themes of empowerment, responsibility to others, interdependence, collaboration, and collegiality are basic values underlying their philosophy and practice.

In describing the leadership style of women, Helgesen (1990) uses the metaphor of a web, with the leader in the middle connected to its many strands. Implicit in the management philosophy of women leaders embracing this theme is the importance of affiliation, inclusion, and group versus individual achievement.

> *Webs and nets...suggest a complexity of relationships and the delicate interrelatedness of all so that tension and movement in one part of the system will grow to be felt in all parts of the whole. In the complexity of a web, no one position dominates over the rest. Each person -- no matter how small -- has some potential for power; each is always subject to the actions of others.* (Belenky et al., 1986, p.178)

Uniqueness and diversity are viewed as positive organizational characteristics in the metaphors of 14% of the directors. This metaphorical theme probably reflects the general emphasis in the field on celebrating individual differences as well as directors' heightened awareness of diversity issues in the wider culture. Lisa, the director of a community college child care center, used the metaphor of a *box of gourmet cookies* to capture the essence of her center (see Figure 8). She states, *"Each staff member is unique in his/her own way and brings certain talents which contribute to the entire package."*

Organizational stress, tension, and obstacles are evident in the metaphors that 12% of directors use to describe the dysfunctional elements of their centers. Some of these relate to negative surprise (*volcano -- you never know when it's going to erupt)*; others relate to a breakdown in communication systems or operations *(frozen pond with a crack down the center separating staff and management)*. Some of the examples under this rubric capture the stress and tension that directors experience when they encounter obstacles or road blocks in achieving their goals (see Figure 9).

Activity and entertainment metaphors characterize a cluster of organizational descriptors used by 10% of directors. These metaphors exude energy and vitality; they capture the variety and pace of activity of everyday life in programs. *Circus* is the most popular metaphor used in this category. Many of the metaphors in this category also capture the structural elements of organizational life -- that people are assigned many different tasks and these tasks must be coordinated. Figure 10 is one director's visual representation of her center that conveys this activity theme.

Steadfast, resilient, and dependable are the defining characteristics of a small group of the metaphors that directors use to describe their centers. Much of the organizational management literature from business and industry refers to organizations as machines, operating with efficiency and precision (Morgan, 1986). This theme is not embraced widely by early childhood directors. Only 5% of directors referred to the constancy and dependability of their centers. When they did, their metaphors had a decidedly early childhood ring to them (e.g., *energizer bunny -- it keeps going and going* or *a well-oiled gerbil wheel -- it functions constantly).*

The Discrepancy Between Current and Ideal

The metaphors directors use to describe their organizations can serve as a prism for understanding their management philosophies and their perceptions of the culture of their centers. They can also serve to illuminate issues that need to be resolved and inconsistencies between the director's beliefs and assumptions and his/her actual behavior. The following case study provides an example of this type of analysis.

Linda is the director of a Head Start program who used the metaphor *family* to describe her center. Upon reflection, however, she came to realize that embracing this metaphor might actually be impeding her desire to promote professionalism among her staff. A management philosophy built around the *family* metaphor was promoting dependence on her *(the parent figure)* rather than promoting the development of autonomous professionals -- teachers who could make decisions on their own. She also came to realize how her own role stress was tied to her internal conceptualizations of her program and her personal belief that she had somehow failed if a valued teacher left her center or if staff didn't get along. In reflecting out loud, Linda says,

> *For years, I've felt like a failure every time one of my teachers left the center. I saw each departing teacher as either a death or a divorce depending on the circumstances of that teacher's departure. I also see now that I've taken minor disagreements among my staff (normal sibling rivalry) way too personally. I guess, like a parent, I wanted my children to live in total harmony.*

In conceptualizing a new metaphor for her ideal organization, Linda came up with the metaphor of a *Broadway play.* For her, the play metaphor retains the notion of trust and caring, but also has elements of independence and autonomy. Putting this metaphor into practice mentally and behaviorally, Linda felt would help her achieve the affective neutrality that she needed in order to reduce the role stress in her life.

How Directors Perceive Their Roles and Their Jobs

The sociological literature on work organizations defines "role" in terms of expectations -- the normative rights and duties of a role incumbent. "Role expectations can range from required to prohibited, from specific to diffuse, and from impersonal to personal" (Lipham, 1988, p.174). Role theory assumes that for any particular role there is a set of expected tasks and responsibilities that lead to certain behaviors. In some settings like the military, role expectations are highly prescribed. In other situations like many early childhood work environments, the expectations may be loosely structured and defined by the individual's interests and preferences.

Role perception is defined as an individual's unique and private perception of his or her phenomenological world in terms of expectations, motivation, accomplishment, relationships, psycho-physical state, and time orientation (Wax & Hale, 1984). Every individual represents a range of interests, values, abilities, priorities, and expectations; and each functions as a unique, unified combination of these characteristics. The metaphors that directors use to describe their

administrative role and their specific jobs are illustrative because they provide a glimpse into the director's inner world of expectations, concerns, hopes, and dreams.

Metaphorical Themes

When asked to think of a metaphor for their administrative role (*A director is a ...*), individuals tend to select somewhat different images than they do for their own specific jobs (*My job is a...*). Metaphors regarding their overall administrative role often reflect a set of idealized expectations about their position, their beliefs about the importance of the role, and their summary judgment about the nature of the position. The metaphors directors use to describe their specific jobs are richly descriptive of the demands they experience every day.

Role. As shown in the metaphor examples in Table 2, the most dominant theme that surfaces when directors refer to their administrative role is the multifaceted nature of the position that requires the balancing of multiple tasks and responsibilities. In my sample of 257 directors, 40% gave responses that fit into one of three related categories: balancing, multiple tasks, or balancing multiple tasks and responsibilities. The most frequently mentioned metaphor used was *juggler*.

Anyone who has chased the shadow of a director for even a brief time will appreciate the accuracy of this metaphor. Being an effective administrator means wearing many hats -- budget analyst, nutritionist, nurse, fundraiser, to name a few. The list is long and varied. While administering an early childhood program has never been easy, the director's job has gotten increasingly complex and more difficult in recent years; the number of balls to keep up in the air at any one time has multiplied. Listen to Tom, a director for 20 years, as he describes the personal relevance of the juggler metaphor to his professional experience.

> *The director needs to keep his eye on many things at once and hopefully not let too many of them drop, at least not the important things. It's a daily choice which things you're going to deal with. You need to be comfortable with the understanding that you're never going to be able to do everything you need to. There is simply no rest from it -- there is always something coming at you.*

Metaphors that describe the leading and guiding functions of the director's role were used by 29% of the directors. These metaphors were more varied, however. Individuals used metaphorical references both to leadership roles in other fields (e.g., orchestra conductor, football coach, safari guide) as well as things that symbolize leadership attributes (e.g., lighthouse).

Interestingly, absent from directors' metaphorical references is the theme of exerting power and influence. Leadership is virtually always viewed as guiding, coordinating, inspiring, and motivating; never cajoling, forcing, or imposing. The lack of metaphors connoting power and influence is consistent with previous research that has found that early childhood directors (most of whom are female) have a preference for participatory, non-hierarchical management styles. Many directors even express discomfort when thinking about their role as involving a position of authority (Culkin, 1994).

Two additional metaphorical categories -- nurturing/protecting and making connections -- merit discussion because they are central to the field of early childhood and to feminist literature. Several scholars identify the themes of connection and caring as central to women's psychological development and learning (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldgerger, & Tarule, 1986; Caffarella, 1992; Chodorow, 1987; Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). Together, these two categories were mentioned by 23% of directors. These are important themes because they provide an explanatory framework for understanding the management philosophy of many early childhood directors as well as many of the role-related stress issues that confront directors.

Job. When directors are asked to use a metaphor to describe their specific jobs, there is a clear and consistent pattern to their responses (see Table 3). One-half of all responses relate to pace and dealing with the unexpected. The most frequently cited metaphor combining these two elements is *roller coaster*. Karen, a seasoned director of a large nonprofit center, describes her use of this metaphor.

> *The roller coaster typically has the longest line in the amusement park. Pretend that those waiting in line have never been on the roller coaster. They look up and say "Why can't those people get control of that ride?" "Why don't they just slow it down?" How surprised they are to find out that when they get on the ride, they can't do any better. That's why its such a wild ride. It is a never-ending ride up and down. With maturity you can learn to handle the fast downs. But a director in the survival stage is in the last car getting whipped around. You don't really get off until you leave your program.*

Additional metaphorical categories relating to directors' specific jobs include caring and nurturing (17%), challenge and problem solving (11%), stress (8%), making connections (3%), multiple tasks and responsibilities (3%), and miscellaneous (5%).

The Discrepancy Between Current and Ideal

When directors reflect on the subtext and personal meanings associated with specific metaphor choices, such analysis often surfaces a discrepancy between current and ideal perceptions of their role. If directors have expectations, for example, that they should be like a captain of a jumbo jet or the head coach for a Super Bowl team and yet the reality of their everyday life is more like a Ferris wheel spinning out of control or a door mat that everyone walks all over, that discrepancy can lead to role stress and feelings of inadequacy.

The in-depth interviews I conducted with directors revealed that most experience conflicting emotions about their jobs. On the one hand, they derive enormous satisfaction and personal rewards from serving children and families. They appreciate the diversity of tasks, the opportunity to solve complex problems, and the chance to learn more about their own abilities and beliefs. At the same time, however, they also experience enormous frustration about not being able to meet everyone's needs and not having enough time and energy to achieve their dream of operating a smoothly functioning, crisis-free program. Metaphorical analysis can be a

useful technique for assisting directors in identifying the discrepancy between their current and ideal situation.

Marlene, the director of a small for-profit center, is typical of many directors with whom I have worked over the years. She states: *"My greatest satisfaction is the smile on parents' faces when their children tell them all the wonderful things they did during the course of the day."* When asked to describe her frustrations on the job, she pours out a litany of complaints about parents who don't comply with the center's policies, parents who don't follow through with their commitments, and parents who are neglectful of their basic parenting responsibilities. Parents are the source of her greatest satisfaction, yet also the source of her deepest frustrations.

When asked to describe the role of the director in metaphorical terms, Marlene used the metaphor of an orchestra conductor. *"The good conductor is 'in charge' and knows how to achieve real harmony out of very different (and sometimes competing) sounds."* This metaphor captured Marlene's idealized expectations for herself as a director, that she should be able to achieve perfect harmony out of all the competing needs at her center. In sharp contrast was the metaphor she used to describe her specific job. *"I'm like a marionette. Everyone pulls my strings. They can make me jump, hop, and dance, even when I don't want to."*

In discussions about role stress, a common theme expressed by many directors is that they are expected to be all things to all people. Certainly Marlene's metaphor about her job captures elements of this theme. Several scholars (Belenky, et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984) emphasize that a primary organizing principle for women's lives is "doing for others." This means that women often respond to the initiatives and directives of others before attending to their own needs. Women define themselves as moral agents in terms of their capacity to care. Thus their sense of self-worth is often tied to how much they give to others. The result of this orientation is that many women often put their own needs at the bottom of the list after children, staff, and family members -- even to the point of depletion.

In my work with directors I point out some of the ways that metaphorical analysis can provide insights into how they can modify their current situation (both their behavior and their expectations) to reduce job related stress. I begin with a metaphor like the one Diane, the director of a half-day preschool program, shared with me. *I'm an ATM machine – I'm always ready to give different amounts of time, energy, and care to different people at a moment's notice.*

Diane's ATM metaphor captures the essence of the caring/nurturing role perception expressed by many directors. After sharing this metaphor with a group of directors, I ask them to come up with creative strategies that a director could use to reduce role stress. They are quick to offer advice. *"The ATM machine could give out smaller bills." "How about putting an 'out of order' sign up and directing people to another ATM machine." "I'd increase the service charge for using the ATM machine." "I think the bank needs to let its customers know that they also need to give deposits to the ATM machine, not only take withdrawals."*

After generating a dozen or so creative ideas, we then take time as a group to translate each of these metaphorical solutions to concrete practical strategies that directors can use to put the ever-pressing emotional demands of their jobs in perspective. This kind of group exercise, I have found, is a non-threatening way for directors to deal with the real, and often painful, decisions they need to make about modifying their expectations and their behavior to ensure they will remain a thriver in the field of early childhood.

Conclusion

The evocative metaphorical images that directors use to capture the essence of their administrative experience paint a portrait of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems. They also provide a glimpse into the future -- the possibilities for reshaping roles, solving problems, and redirecting energies to achieve greater personal and professional fulfillment.

In her book Composing a Life, Bateson (1989) states that the act of composing our lives is oftentimes improvisation, discovering the shape of our creation along the way, rather than pursuing a vision already defined" (p. 1). Self-awareness, reflection, and self-assessment are integral tools that facilitate this process. A fulfilling job has balance and diversity, coherence and fit. It is as much crafted as it is the result of a series of serendipitous decisions that we come upon. Whitmyer (1994) stresses the importance of finding meaningful work and the Buddhist tradition of "right livelihood." He states that, "Work is no less necessary for our emotional and physical health than food or shelter" (p. 19). He believes that reflecting on what we do, how we do it, and why we do it will help expand and enhance our ability to find meaningful work.

Understanding directors rests upon our ability to pay close attention to the complexities of their individual lives. Because all people make their own meanings, it is essential that we perceive what they say, how they think, how they feel, and how they understand (Levine, 1989). In listening to directors, one hears both similarities and differences. The similarities often relate to their career stage or the context of their work situation; the differences underscore the many ways in which their experiences impact them uniquely.

Requiring directors to look inward at themselves -- their fears, anxieties, and disappointments as well as those things that make them happy or satisfied -- can be uncomfortable, but as Bowman (1989) underscores, it is essential for professional growth and development. When directors are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and how their expectations shape their behavior, they will be better able to understand, monitor, and modify their personal and professional interactions.

The developmental constructs described in this chapter help explain common and individual differences among directors in how they view their organizations, their roles, and their specific jobs. Additional research is needed, however, to help us understand how changes in growth and development in these various dimensions occurs as a function of experience, education, and specific training. This information should help in the design of director credentialing programs for directors.

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Table 1
Metaphorical Categories for Organization *(My organization/center is a ...)* N=257

caring and nurturing (22%)*
- garden – we nurture but we also have to weed it often and replant new seeds
- warm quilt – love and the colors of life are splashed across it; the threads are our commitment
- home – it protects, nurtures, teaches, frustrates, and encourages
- family – because we care about each other
- haven from a hectic world where staff and children can blossom and grow.

change/growth/surprise (18%)
- Martha Stewart's house – there's always something interesting going on
- coffee shop – something is always brewing
- box of chocolate – never know what you are going to get
- lens coming into focus – we're growing up and maturing
- ladder – we are climbing for the top
- surprise party – you never know quite what to expect

making connections (relationship between parts and whole) (16%)
- jigsaw puzzle - many pieces come together to form vision
- Broadway play – we all have essential parts that make up the production
- crazy quilt of many colors, shapes, and stitches because we are so many parts making up the whole

uniqueness and diversity (14%)
- unicorn – its unique unlike any other
- melting pot – we have many different talents, skills, and personalities
- box of gourmet cookies – each staff member is unique in his/her own way and brings certain talents which contribute to the entire package

***organizational* stress, tension, and obstacles** (12%)
- merry-go-round – it's a vicious cycle – ideas go round and round, but no one gets off or changes seats
- meteor shower – you don't know what's coming at you next
- volcano – you never know when it's going to erupt
- road block – the governing body keeps blocking the road to NAEYC accreditation
- frozen pond with a crack down the center separating staff and management

activity and entertainment (10%)
- circus – noisy, colorful, and exciting
- beehive – lots of activity and eventually everyone comes 'home'
- Grand Central Station – lots of people (always in a rush) coming and going at all times of the day
- cabaret – lots of different acts entertaining us throughout the day

steadfast, resilient, and dependable (5%)
- buoy – no matter what happens it seems to stay afloat
- energizer bunny – it keeps going and going
- well-oiled gerbil wheel – it functions constantly

miscellaneous (3%)
- extension of my personality – I have dedicated 25 years to making it a quality preschool

* percentage of responses falling in this category

Table 2
Metaphorical Categories for Role (*A director is a ...*) N=257

balancing (5%)*
- seesaw – everything has to balance and little things can throw it off
- scale – constantly balancing all aspects of the environment
- tightrope walker – balancing the demands of the parents and the staff

multiple tasks and responsibilities (7%)
- actor/actress – we must create and become many roles
- actor – I must play many parts even though I am one person
- rack full of hats – I assume different roles through the day

balancing + multiple tasks and responsibilities (28%)
- juggler – she has to keep her eyes on many things at once and try not to let them drop
- circus clown juggling so many balls
- plate spinner – I work frantically to keep all the plates spinning
- ringmaster of a large circus – introducing new "acts" while keeping the "circus" together and going
- octopus – I'm expected to do 20 things all at once

leading and guiding (29%)
- coach – she needs a game plan and has to choose the right team members to make the plan work
- captain of a jumbo jet – takes amazing skill to maneuver plane keeping it steady in calm and stormy weather
- quarterback – her job is to lead, but she often gets too much credit and too much blame
- captain of a space craft – who gets input from other people in order to navigate the ship on a correct course
- orchestra conductor – the good conductor is 'in charge' and knows how to achieve harmony out of different (and sometimes competing) sounds
- lighthouse – guides teachers, parents, and children
- seeing-eye dog – she guides staff and parents
- weather vane – points people in the right direction even when winds blow from different directions

nurturing and protecting (15%)
- tree – she branches out to reach and support others
- umbrella because she protects and shields staff from outside forces
- gardener – she nurtures her seedlings by tending, caring, and fertilizing
- parent – she takes care of all of the members of her family
- mom – she nurturers everyone but herself

making connections (8%)
- wheel hub – central connection point through which other things flow
- DNA double helix strand – of all the interconnected interrelated work supports the lives of children
- puzzle solver – putting together the pieces of an intricate puzzle

dealing with the unexpected (4%)
- firefighter – you never know when or where the next fire will be
- meteorologist – I forecast one thing, mother nature delivers another

miscellaneous (4%)
- superhero – you are expected to do everything anytime
- cup of coffee – hot and bold in the morning and cold and stale at the end
- boxer – you take hits from both sides
- poop scooper – you have to deal with all the crap

* percentage of responses falling in this category

Table 3
Metaphorical Categories for Job (*My job is a ...) N=257*

pace (15%)*
- cartoon roadrunner – I'm animated and moving fast constantly
- whirlwind spinning and twirling
- rolling stone – I don't stop long enough to gather moss
- treadmill – I'm always running to catch up
- Ferris wheel spinning out of control

dealing with the unexpected (16%)
- a freeway – it goes in different directions and you make all kinds of detours
- maze – there is always a new twist or turn to deal with
- temperature – because it has its ups and downs
- a cruise ship that encounters bad weather
- hot air balloon – it has its ups and downs in good and bad weather

pace + dealing with the unexpected (19%)
- roller coaster – its fast/slow, up/down, smooth/bumpy, fun/scary
- white water rafting – riding the rapids
- riding a surfboard – sometimes I ride the big wave, but mostly I just try to keep from falling off

caring and nurturing (17%)
- Mother Teresa – I'm always giving so much to so many
- gardener – I till the soil, fertilize, and weed when necessary to keep the plants healthy and growing
- big ear – I listen, empathize, and support staff, children, and parents
- ATM machine – I'm always ready to give different amounts of time, energy, care to different people at a moment's notice

challenge and problem solving (11%)
- climbing a mountain – the challenges are awesome, the views are breathtaking, even though momentary
- putting together a 1,000 piece jigsaw puzzle – a real challenge to get to done right
- plumber – I stop the leaks and keep the communication flowing smoothly
- magician – I'm suppose to make money appear out of no where
- scotch tape – I mend the cracks in communication between staff and management

stress (8%)
- like walking on eggshells – I'm afraid I'll upset certain people
- rubber band – I'm being stretched beyond my limits; I'm ready to snap
- hurricane watch – I feel like I'm always waiting for the eye of the storm to hit
- door mat – everyone walks all over me
- marionette – everyone pulls my strings; they can make me jump, hop, and dance even when I don't want to

making connections (6%)
- tapestry – every day its a new stitch in creating a master piece
- bouquet of flowers – I love to bring all parts together for children and parents

multiple tasks and responsibilities (3%)
- like a broken mirror – my job is so fragmented
- hat rack – I wear so many hats during the day

miscellaneous (5%)
- party – because I have so much fun

* percentage of responses falling in this category

Figure 1
Visual Representation -- Caring and Nurturing Metaphorical Theme

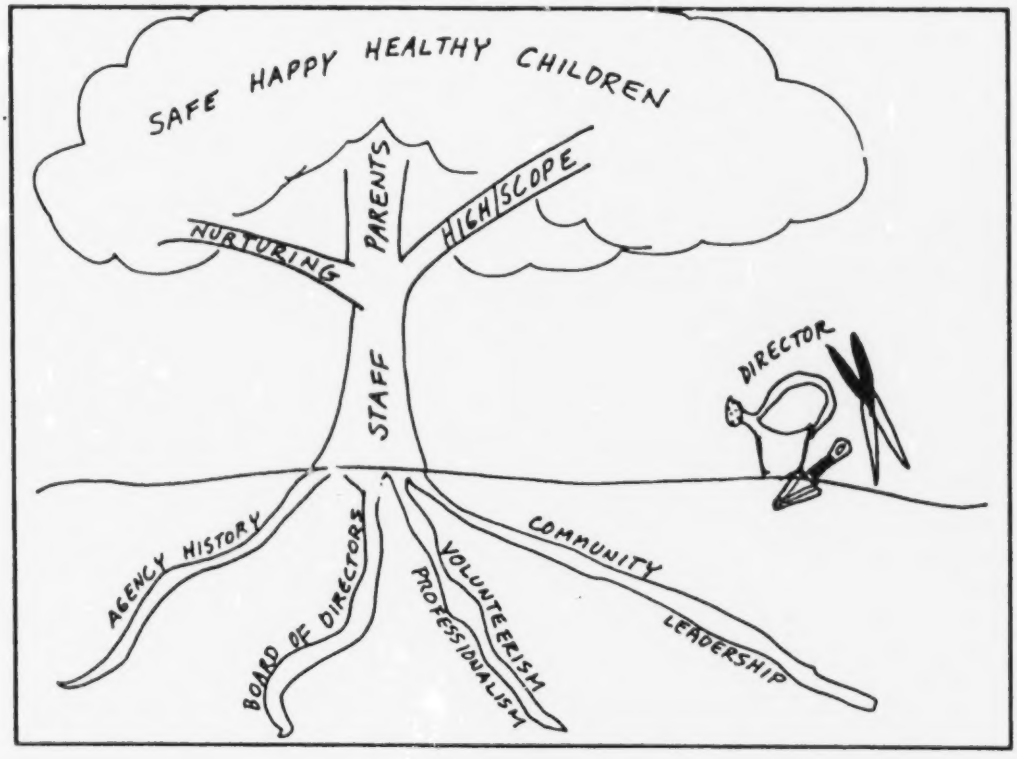


Figure 2
Visual Representation -- Caring and Nurturing Metaphorical Theme

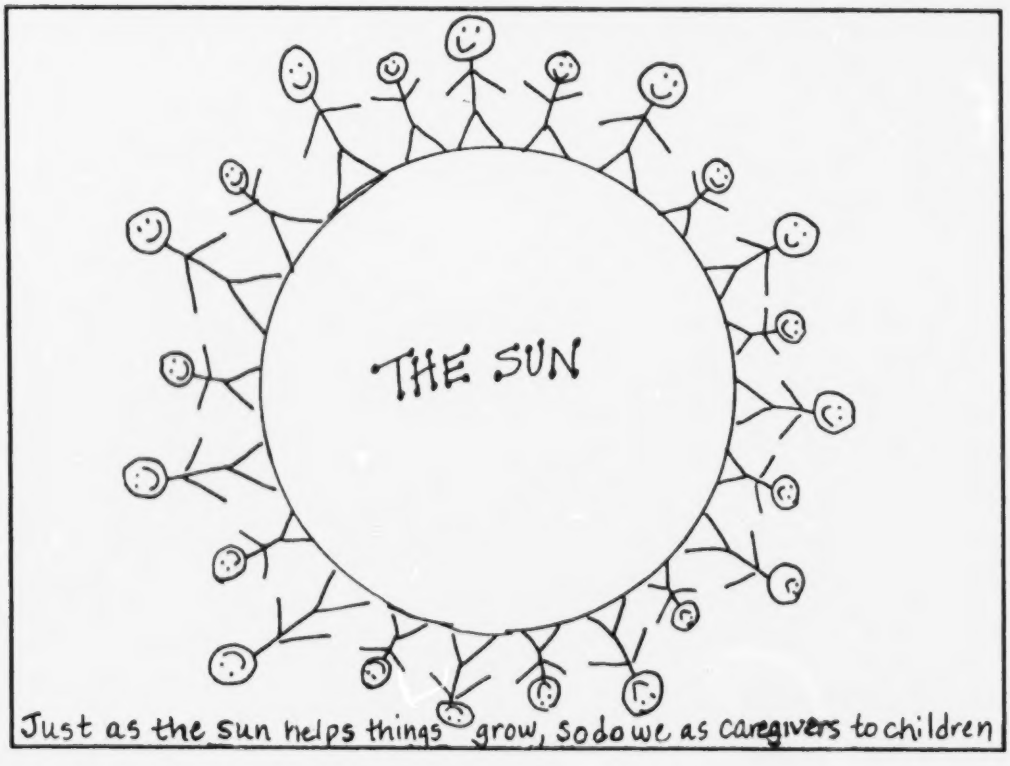


Figure 3
Visual Representation -- Growth, Change, and Surprise Metaphorical Theme

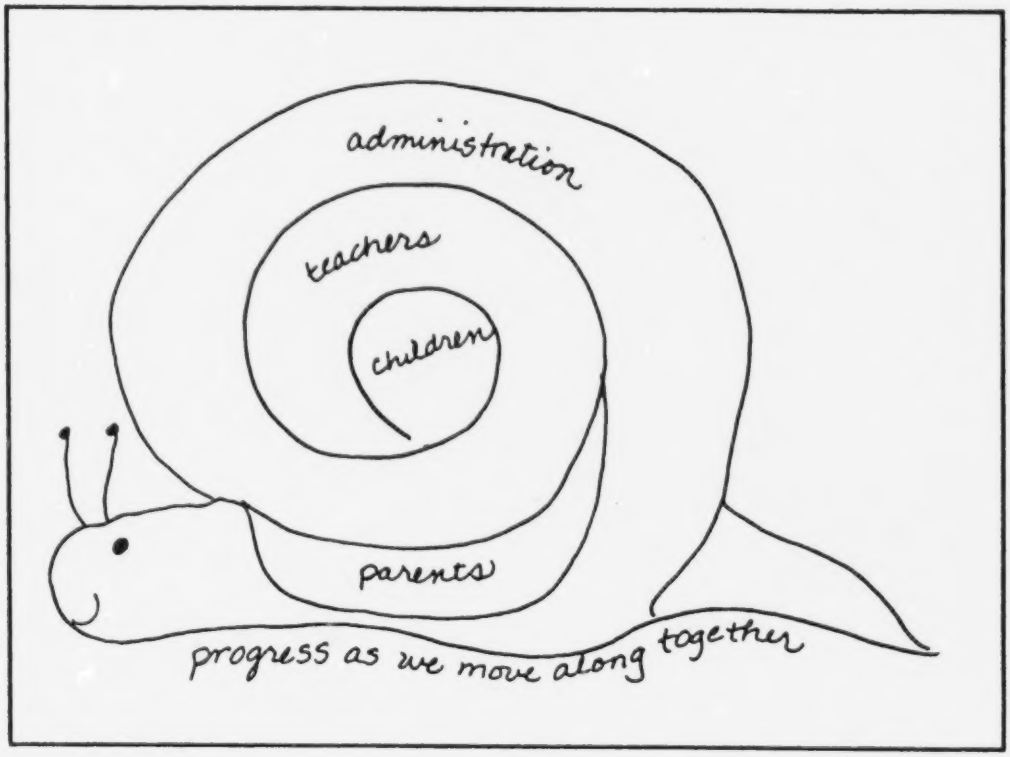


Figure 4
Visual Representation -- Making Connections Metaphorical Theme

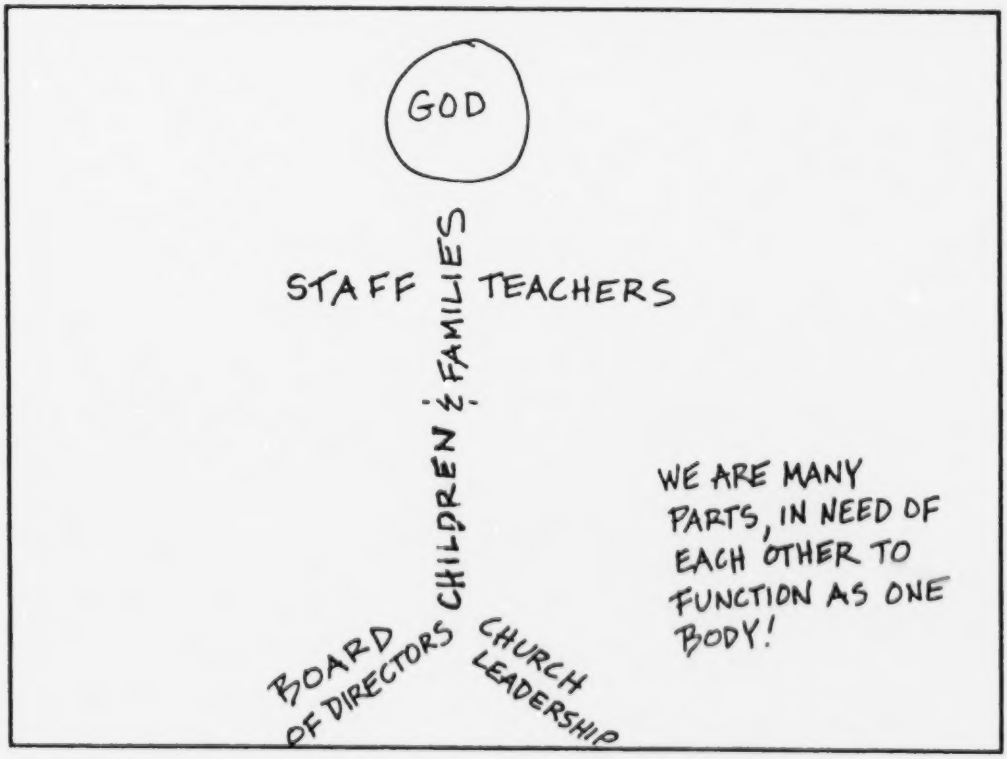


Figure 5
Visual Representation -- Making Connections Metaphorical Theme

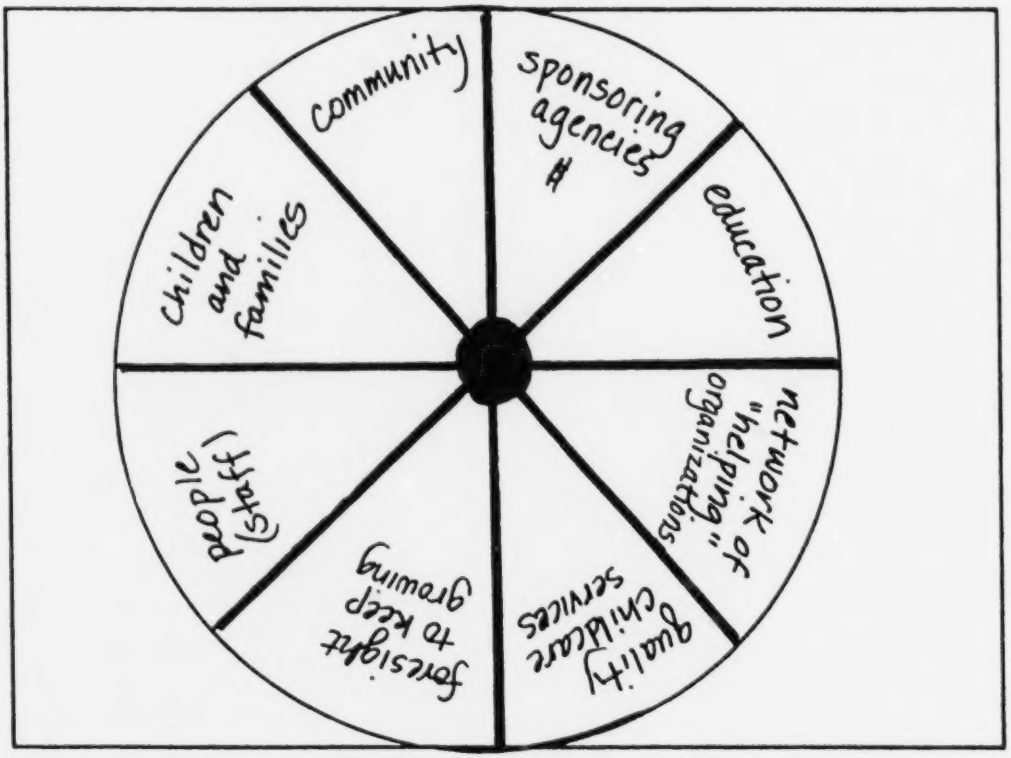


Figure 6
Visual Representation -- Making Connections Metaphorical Theme

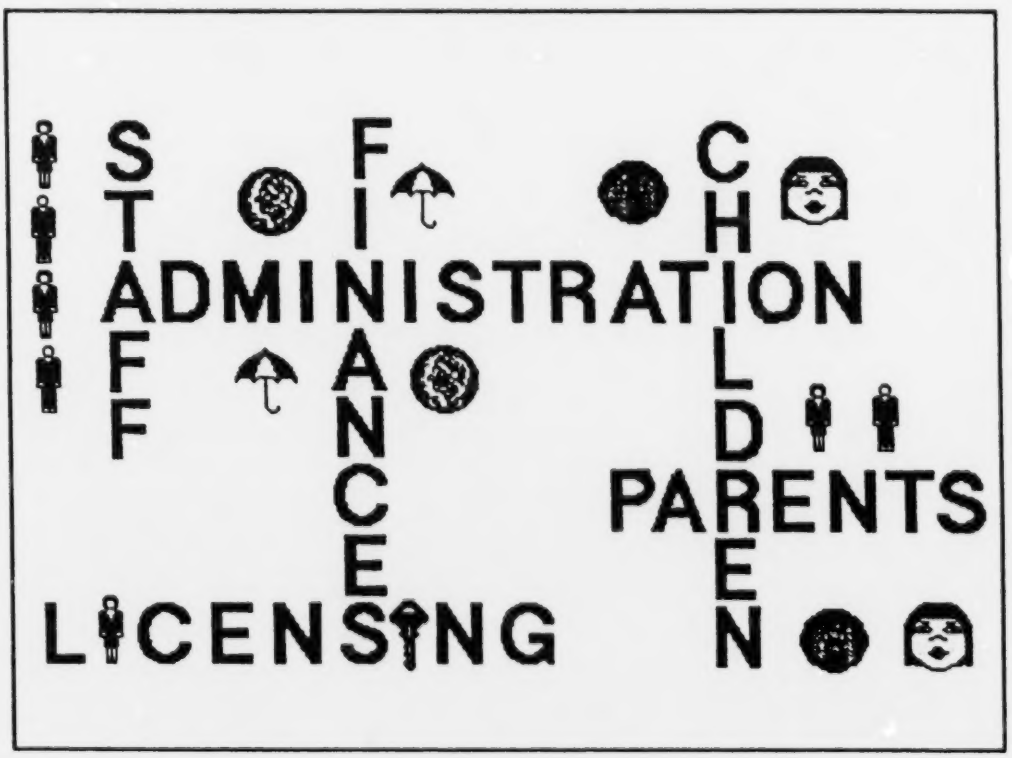


Figure 7
Visual Representation -- Making Connections Metaphorical Theme

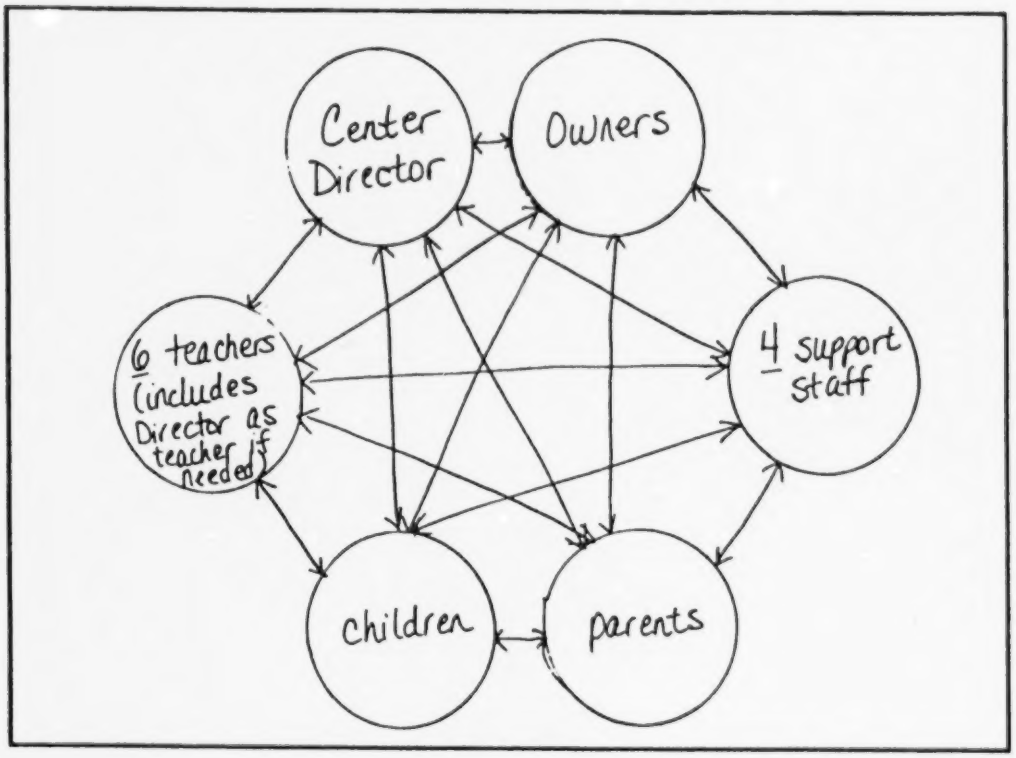


Figure 8
Visual Representation -- Uniqueness and Diversity Metaphorical Theme

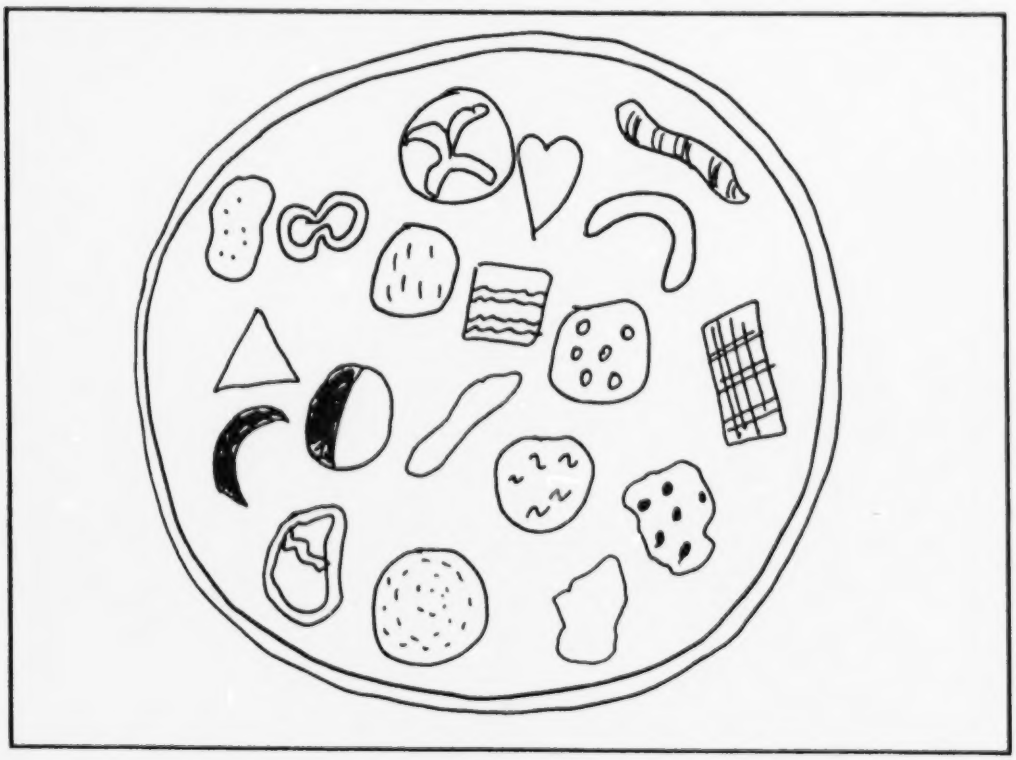


Figure 9
Visual Representation -- Organizational Stress/Tension/Obstacles Theme

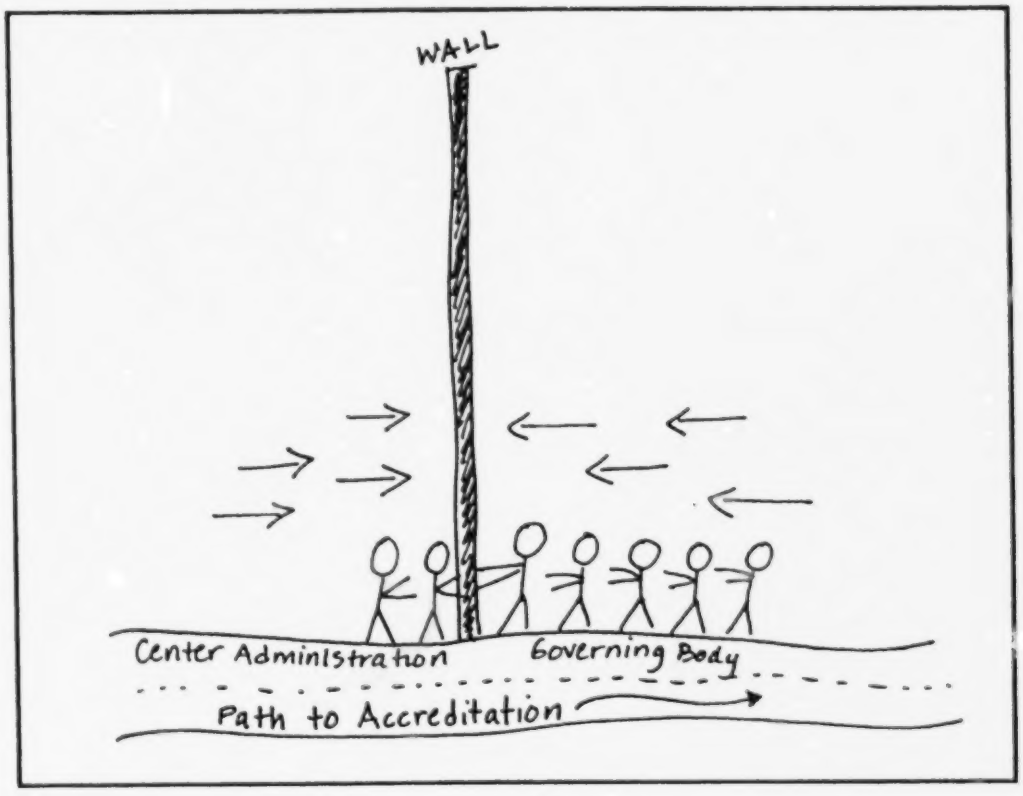
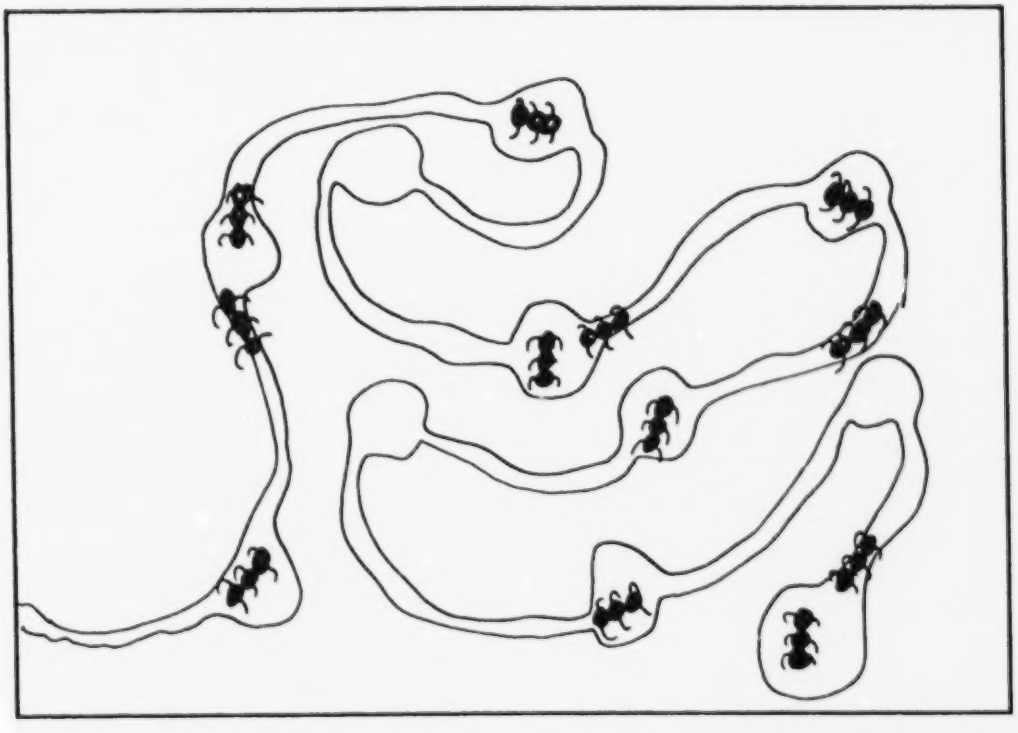


Figure 10
Visual Representation -- Activity and Entertainment Metaphorical Theme



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Images from the Field:
How Directors View Their Organizations, Their Roles, and Their Jobs

Abstract

This study looked at early childhood center directors' perceptions of their organizations, their roles, and their specific jobs. The metaphoric images of 257 directors were analyzed to generate dominant themes in the way directors viewed their world of work and the discrepancy between their current and ideal conditions. In describing their centers, several metaphorical themes surfaced (e.g., caring and nurturing; making connections; uniqueness and diversity) with no one theme characterizing more than 22% of the directors' responses. The metaphors directors used to describe their administrative role reflected a set of idealized expectations about their positions, their beliefs about the importance of the role, and their summary judgment about the nature of the position. Forty percent of directors referred to the multifaceted nature of the position that requires the balancing of multiple tasks and responsibilities (e.g. *juggler)*; another 29% refered to the leading/guiding fuctions of the director's role (e.g. *orchestra conductor, lighthouse)*. In providing metaphors for their specific job, 50% of the metaphors related to pace and dealing with the unexpected. The most frequently cited metaphor combining these two elements was *roller coaster*. The results of this study confirm that examining the metaphors that directors use to describe their organizations, their administrative role, and their specific job is a powerful way to gain insight into the assumptions, beliefs, expectations, and personal visions individuals have for themselves and their organizations.

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